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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DJIBOUTI 001069

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF, AF/E;
LONDON, PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHER;

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [DJ](#)

SUBJECT: BORREL ANNIVERSARY: UNHEALED WOUNDS REOPENED

REF: A. 2004 DJIBOUTI 1372

[B](#). 2004 DJIBOUTI 1084

[C](#). 2004 DJIBOUTI 585

Classified By: Erinn C. Stott for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#). (C) Summary: The Borrel Affair has been a recurring drama between France and the Djiboutian Government for the past ten years since the discovery of French Judge Bernard Borrel's burned corpse just outside Djibouti City on October 19, 1995. Initial conclusions in the investigation into Borrel's death ruled it a suicide. However, Judge Borrel's wife has never believed the suicide theory and has kept the investigation open in France. To coincide with the tenth anniversary of her husband's death, Elisabeth Borrel reportedly invited major French networks to a press conference to debate the case. The media blitz that ensued in France has once again disquieted the Djiboutian Government and has prompted a backlash from the state-run media in Djibouti. It has re-ignited the issue for the Government of Djibouti and renewed its sparring with the French media and judicial system.

[2](#). (C) This year's retaliation for the French media coverage of the Borrel Affair was an official announcement October 21st by Attorney General Djama Souleiman Ali, that Djibouti would sever its agreement of judicial cooperation with France. Past retaliations by the Djiboutian Government have included terminating Radio France International broadcasts into Djibouti, the expulsion of six French cooperative advisors, accusing the French Government of trying to destabilize Djibouti and requesting the French Government "reign in" the French media. Post believes the recurring nature of the Borrel Affair does not indicate more degradation and dangers than usual to Djibouti-France relations. Rather its an issue reignited each time Borrel issues surface in the public domain in France. End Summary.

[3](#). (C) October 18, 2005 marks the tenth anniversary of French Judge Bernard Borrel's death just outside Djibouti City in [1](#)1995. Since the declassification of French Military documents pertaining to the case in March 2004, the Borrel Affair has been one of the most tense issues between the French and the Djiboutian governments. The Government of Djibouti has in the past urged the French government to control its media, believing much of the reported content to be slanderous towards President Guelleh and the Government of Djibouti. At one point in 2004, Djibouti accused France of trying to destabilize Djibouti with blasts made by the French media (Ref C).

[4](#). (C) The Borrel Affair returned to the forefront of Djibouti-France tensions in August 2004 with President Guelleh's scheduled official visit to commemorate the 60th anniversary of allied landings during WWII (Ref B). Following the request of Elisabeth Borrel's lawyers to question Guelleh while he was in country, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that Guelleh would be guaranteed immunity from questioning during his visit. Borrel resurfaced again in September 2004, when the Court of Versailles summoned Djibouti's Attorney General, Djama Souleiman Ali, to respond to a complaint entered by Elisabeth Borrel (Ref A). Souleiman refused the summons and stated "French magistrates forget easily that Djibouti is an independent and sovereign country. They still think Djibouti is a French territory. There is a judicial agreement between Djibouti and France since September 27th, 1986 and if they want to call me, they have to go through that procedure." Following the massive media attention that this issue received, the French Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defense issued a joint statement clarifying their positions towards Djibouti and the Borrel case. The French Minister of Justice also made a statement on Radio France International reminding judges of the presumption of innocence and admonished them to not rush to judgment. This statement appeared to appease the Djiboutian government and this incident did not spark the usual French-media bashing in the local government-run newspaper.

[5](#). (C) In May 2005, President Guelleh made his first official visit to France after winning the Presidential election on April 8th. During this visit he was summoned by French courts for questioning. This summons was not fulfilled because of Guelleh's diplomatic immunity as a head of state. However,

the summons, combined with the scheduling of an investigative report by TV5 on the Borrel Affair during the visit, led to apparent retaliatory actions once again from the Djiboutian government. This time transmissions into Djibouti by Radio France International (RFI) were cut and Djibouti expelled six French technical advisors.

16. (C) In honor of the tenth anniversary of her husband's death, Elisabeth Borrel invited major French media stations October 19 to a press conference, reportedly to debate the case. Anticipating a major media blitz from the French Press, the Djiboutians decided to counter this coverage with their own stories in the local government-run newspaper, La Nation. With more than three full pages of coverage, including one quarter of the front page, the articles were heavily slanted against the French media, and in some cases, insulting. Articles and editorials frequently bad-mouthed the Djiboutian witnesses living in exile in Europe, calling one "a megalomaniac liar" and his testimony "crazy." La Nation also ran political cartoons poking fun at Elisabeth Borrel and the number of times she's exhumed her husband's body for autopsies. It also reproduced a letter from the Presidential Affairs Press Service to the French Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel (CSA), dated August 8, 2005, in response to the CSA's letter addressing the complaints from the Presidential Press Service regarding a TV5 story run in May 2005 on the Borrel Affair. The Presidential Press Service stated it would continue to believe that the arrangements of the television program were manipulative and sensationalist, and did not favor a climate of friendship and understanding between the French and Djiboutian people.

16. (C) An Agence-France Presse article of October 21, 2005 reported that Djibouti has suspended its judicial cooperation with France over the Borrel investigation. It quoted Djiboutian Attorney General, Djama Souleiman Ali as saying "The treaty of cooperation between the Republic of Djibouti and France is now null and void." He continued "We have fulfilled our responsibilities regarding the French justice system and we are waiting to hear from them the truth of this case." Ali also stated that no French investigators would set foot on Djiboutian soil until Djibouti received the full case file regarding the Borrel Affair.

17. (C) Comment: Djibouti's actions in response to the many reappearances of the Borrel Affair, especially the media coverage, have in the past appeared to be the Government simply flexing its sovereign muscles in efforts to show that Djibouti will not bend to the wishes of the French at the drop of a hat. However, its recent reactions to media coverage include frequent urgings that the French government "control" its media, in the firm belief that it is within the Government of France's capability to do so. It has also indicated a growing nervousness or concern that this case will not go away and may blow wide open with damaging implications for Djiboutian principals. The documents declassified in 2004 were only those prior to 1997 and according to some news reports are not the documents that are most telling about the possibility of Djiboutian government involvement. If indeed there are documents that clearly implicate President Guilleh in the death of the French judge, the ramifications could be extremely damaging to his political image in and out of Djibouti.

RAGSDALE